

WASHINGTON, DC - After touring the Vermont Department of Labor's Burlington Resource Center Friday, Rep. Peter Welch pledged to support unemployed Vermonters and ensure they receive the assistance they need.

The current economic downturn has forced businesses throughout Vermont to lay-off workers and has overburdened state and federal safety nets. The sharp increase in unemployment claims has strained the Vermont Department of Labor and is depleting the state's unemployment insurance trust fund.

Welch, who was joined by Department of Labor Deputy Commissioner Tom Douse and Kirby sheet metal worker Bart Wilder, outlined components of federal economic stimulus legislation that could assist unemployed Vermonters and hardworking state employees who have been overwhelmed by an increased caseload. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was recently introduced in the House, will:

- Provide up to \$7 billion to reward states enacting reforms designed to increase unemployment insurance coverage to workers. Vermont would receive \$5.7 million without any reforms and could receive up to \$15.2 million.
- Extend the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program, which provides up to 33 weeks of benefits, through Dec. 31, 2009. The program is currently scheduled to expire in March, 2009.
- Increase weekly benefits to unemployed workers by \$9 billion.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act cleared the House Energy and Commerce Committee, on which Rep. Welch serves, Thursday night and is expected to come to a vote in the House next Wednesday.

"Hardly a day goes by without news of more layoffs in Vermont, threatening the livelihood of families and the social fabric of our state. In times like these, we must provide assistance to hardworking Vermonters to help them back on their feet," Welch said. "As Congress works to reinvigorate our nation's economy, I will do all I can to help unemployed Vermonters get back to work."